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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5367
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SUBJECT: President Tandja Appoints New Prime Minister

Ref: Niamey 00684

¶1. (U) Summary: On October 2, President Tandja appointed former finance minister and deputy governor of the Central Bank of West African States, Ali Badjo Gamatie, to serve as Prime Minister. This comes on the heels of the resignation of former Prime Minister Seini Oumarou (reftel), who resigned September 23 to become eligible to run in the legislative elections slated for October 20. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The appointment of Gamatie, a long-time member of ruling party MNSD, places a capable technocrat in an office considered ceremonial. Gamatie, who is a "statistics engineer" and economist by trade, has studied in Cote d'Ivoire, Paris, and Washington, DC. He was a former Nigerien Minister of Finance, head of statistical cooperation for the European Union Mission in Ouagadougou, deputy governor of the Central Bank of West African States, and long-time economist at the World Bank.

Gamatie Seen as Defender of National Interests

¶3. (U) Tele-Sahel, Niger's government media outlet, reported that President Tandja selected Gamatie because he is a "sincere and committed compatriot, who is able to defend Niger's interests at the national and international levels." It went on to state that President Tandja had noted Gamatie's experience as an expert in international finance who had valuable experience in negotiations with development partners.

Gamatie Has Sketchy Past

¶4. (U) According to local media accounts, critics argue that President Tandja had chosen the wrong person, noting that Gamatie has been the focus of several investigations pertaining to financial scandals dating back to 2003. In August 2003, in the midst of the run-up to the 2004 general elections, the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), the main opposition party, alerted media sources to a scandal involving a "Luxemburg bank account" purportedly opened by the then-Minister of Finance (Gamatie). When news reports surfaced of the malfeasance, Gamatie resigned from his post as finance minister and was appointed to the Central Bank of West African States by President Tandja. President Tandja and Gamatie have been linked ever since.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) Gamatie is a loyal supporter of President Tandja and has a reputable background in finance. He has a strong relationship with donors, which could prove beneficial given that Niger faces a fiscal shortfall from a drop off in bilateral aid. End Comment.

WHITAKER